PREFACE

The festivals and dances are very important in the life of the Khasis since time immemorial, they play an important role in the life and culture of the Khasis. Besides providing entertainments and social festivities to them, the festivals also act as an integrating force for the community as a whole. The different festivals which are observed in different parts of the year, regulate the activities of the people throughout the year. The festivals are connected with agriculture and cultivation rites of the people and also with general prosperity, well being and for dispelling diseases and evil spirits. The people propitiated God their Creator for His blessings and kindness throughout the year.

Some scholars have attempted to study the festivals in the past, and some articles appeared here and there in certain journals and magazines, but no one has attempted to make a specific study of only the festivals, their origin, contents and social relevance. The study of the festivals reveals that they play a very important role in the social, political, religious and economic life of the people. The festivals have been part and parcel of the whole social existence of the community.

An attempt is being made in this work to study the history of the Khasis as reflected in their festivals, so that it will serve as a beginning for future research work. My objective is to bring into focus the historical contents that lay dormant in the festivals and to study the festivals in historical perspective. In this dissertation, five important festivals of the Khasis have been selected. The study begins with an introduction to the land and people, then the Khasi Calendar. The Khasis like the rest of the people in the world have their own system of calculating time which is based on agricultural activities and nature, their month is a lunar one and they have an eight days week which is based on market operations. The festivals are then studied which include their origins, stages and contents. The study ends with a conclusion of the social relevances of the festivals and my own observations and judgement.

I would like to mention here, that when I gave the Pre-submission Seminar on the 23rd March 1985, the members of the evaluation committee advised me to further examine (i) whether
the term "calendar" is appropriate in the Khasi case, (ii) why none of the festivals studied can be considered as a festival for all the Khasis, and (iii) the possibility of establishing the time depth involved in festivals. In fact, calendar is an English word, and the Khasi expression that serves the purpose is *bk khein snem*. It appears that the Khasi have definite ideas about a day (sngi), a week (taiew), a month (bnai), and a year (snem) etc., and they have been organising their year long activities and preparing the schedules for the festivals, before they came into contact with the English or any other calendar, we therefore, prefer to retain the term calendar. We have shown in our discussion that some festivals are held in some parts of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills due to historical reasons, but these days, every festival is popular with anyone in these hills, a feeling of involvement has come to stay. Regarding the time depth, we have discussed in details the origin of each festival under study and suggested tentatively their antiquities. However, other than Ka Shad Suk Mynsiem, it was not possible to find out the definite dates that the festivals started and we may probe further in future. I am indeed thankful to the members of the Committee for their suggestions and for appreciating my difficulties.

The study has been based mainly on data collected during my field work, through interview with selected knowledgeable persons and those who participate in the festivals, and by taking down notes and through questionnaires. Besides these, I have consulted whatever books, newspapers, magazines and journals available on the subject both in English and Khasi.

I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to my guide and supervisor, Dr J. B. Bhattacharjee. My sincere thanks for his sympathetic and untiring guidance, inspiring advice, without whose help, I would not have been able to complete my thesis.

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KHUBLEI THANK YOU

Dated Shillong
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